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THE NEW PLAYS

"Her Soldier Boy"
Hits the Bull's-Eye.

BY CHARLES DARTON

WHILE Belgium may not be the scene that you might choose for a musical comedy at this time, "Her Soldier Boy" marched to success at the Astor Theatre last night with so sure a tread as to make it the best operetta of the season.

First of all, you give your ear willingly to the music of Emmerich Kalmann, who made "Sari" a delight to us

some years ago. The ragtime added by the inevitable Romberg comes, for once, as an enlivening diversion. In short, it is all entertaining, and, what is more, in good taste.

Once again the war in Europe is brought home to us—but in this instance with romantic interest. The hero of the affair passes himself off as the son of a mother who is blind in order to spare her the sorrow of a loss that might mean her life, whereupon he finds himself in love with his comrade's sister, while she is awakened by a kiss that causes her to exclaim, in her own naive way, "You are not my brother!" You may rest assured that her brother, after singing through his nose in the prologue, returns to his home safe and sound.

Rida Johnson Young has taken this simple story from Victor Leon and

turned it, with lyrics of her own invention, to excellent account. The music is so good that one never tires of it. The "Song of Home," for example, in the opening act, is a thing to be cherished. Into it the composer has put melody, charm and feeling.

This number was sung admirably by John Charles Thomas, who easily carried off the vocal honors of the night.

I don't mean to rob Clifton Crawford of his first honors as a "star," for he proved himself to be a light singing and dancing comedian altogether worthy of the distinction given him. His sense of humor is infectious. He has an easy, graceful way of winning your good opinion. With little effort, apparently, he accomplishes a great deal—and this is the secret that only a few of our comedians have solved. In "History," a ditty that deals humorously with the great of the past, Mr. Crawford put himself well over the footlights. He was even more at his ease in an indolent one-act with a fair-haired partner who entered into the fun of the thing with a nonchalant air.

Adole Howland was delightful in her way as a Red Cross nurse who wanted to go home. If she isn't Irish she ought to be. Her singing and dancing counted largely in the success of the performance. Both Lydy sang well, but too loudly at moments; Ella Giergely was a stumpy and amusing Dutch maid for whom war had no terrors, and Cyril Chadwick provoked laughter as an Englishman who was pressed into service as a supposed spy by his American friend Teddy.

Everything went off very well, and everybody was happy. No more can be said for a musical piece. "Her Soldier Boy" hits the bull's-eye.

Bernhardt in 'Ashes,' Bill Changes

AT the Empire Theatre last night Sarah Bernhardt appeared in two plays new to us, as well as in a scene from "Jeanne D'Arc."

The first play, by Jean de Letraz, "Opium Ashes," is a rather gruesome affair. You see Bernhardt as Xenia, reclining on a couch, kimono-clad, with the heavy fumes of opium in the air. Count Maxime, who had deserted her for the usual conventional reasons—to please his family and to marry—comes at her summons and again succumbs to her charms. Half-siren, half-pantier, she lures him to smoke the opium pipe once more, and then stabs him to the heart with a poisoned needle. With her dead lover before her she turns the needle into her own heart and dies with him amid the opium ashes.

This cheerful little play gave Bernhardt opportunity for the torrid love-making of which she is mistress.

The last play, "The Stained-Glass Window," by Rene Fanchols, brought Mme. Bernhardt into a medieval costume and setting. As Violaine, asleep in her high backed chair dreaming of her lover Bertrand, away on a crusade, she looked like a princess of romance. Her lover returns, his face and form hidden by vizor and mantle, and in a light that ought to have been obscure but was inexcusably bright, he tells her that he has lost an eye and an arm in the war. When she still proclaims her love for him, he announces that he has become a leper in nursing lepers. Indignant, Violaine declares that she still loves him and that their bridal couch shall be their deathbed. Thereupon Bertrand draws the curtain from the stained glass window and stands before her unharmed. This had been his test of her love.

Mme. Bernhardt was in much better voice than on Monday night.

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